JUL 29 '74

INDIANA COLLECTION
Cemeteries

technical leaflet

CEMETERY TRANSCRIBING:

REFERENCE SERVICES

preparations and procedures

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Indiana State Archives

CEMETERY TRANSCRIBING

Cemetery research may supply the only clue to a lost generation in a family. Early vital statistic records generally are incomplete; many Bible records are lost or lay forgotten in attics; and newspaper files before 1900 are incomplete and their obituaries sketchy. Data from cemeteries fill this gap, but their usage depends on their availability and completeness. The following, while aimed primarily for the transcriber of abandoned or rural cemeteries where no formal records exist, can aid any genealogist with clues to locating and accurately transcribing his own family markers.

GEOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH

Adequate preparations in finding cemeteries, proper tools, and personal safeguards dictate the venture's success. Transcribing begins with geographical research in the county or township to discover *all* its cemeteries. Completeness should be the goal; consult maps, local histories and deed records.

Maps supply knowledge on about 80 percent of the cemeteries in a county. These consist of early county maps, which were popular in the 1850's and 1860's, county atlases, which appeared between 1870 and the 1920's, county highway maps, and most important, topographic maps. Early county maps (as well as census records) are valuable for indicating the degree of development in a county at that date; heavily populated areas suggest early settlement and the possibility of a greater number of private cemeteries. County atlases list the majority of cemeteries existing when published. By comparing early and later atlases, one can discover trends in population movements and in cemetery locations.

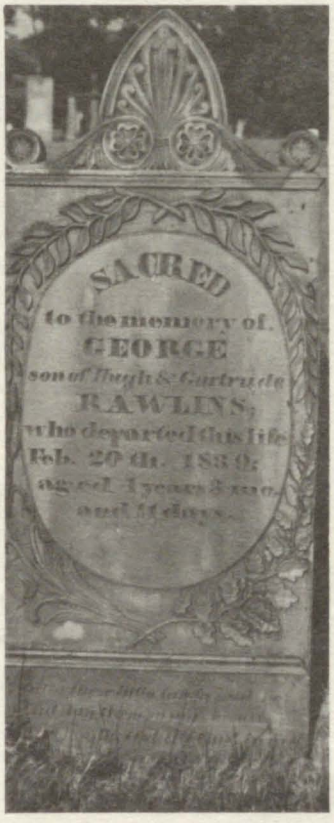
The county surveyor is best versed in his county's geography; his maps list almost all known cemeteries. But his guide, as well as the basis for current maps, are topographic maps. Drawn from aerial photographs, these maps cover a quadrangle of 7.5 X 8.5 square miles, with each mile enlarged to a size slightly over 2.5 inches square, and show forested areas, all roads and trails, streams, most cemeteries, and even buildings. Conservation departments in most states have index maps showing the names of quadrangles in their state. Individual maps may be purchased for a slight cost.

They also are available for consultation in state libraries and in many city and college libraries. While these maps are invaluable for locating cemeteries and suggesting routes to them, many ancient abandoned graveyards, lost in wooded areas, have slipped the mapmaker's attention. Therefore, one must use other sources.

The local historian, who has delved into his county's early records, can locate many "lost" cemeteries. County histories also refer to graveyards, and old obituaries sometimes mention family cemeteries. Farmers are quite knowledgeable in their area's physical features. But the most authoritative of these additional sources are the deed records. In many states deeds mention virtually all cemeteries, often with exact sizes and legal locations. They usually indicate when a cemetery was excluded when the land was sold. One might discover, for instance, a deed reading: "it being understood that the graves shall not be disturbed, but said owners may lay the stones flat and cover them with earth if they choose so to do;" or one stating: "except ten foot Square which the grantor reserves where he has two Children Buried." Today such cemeteries may not exist physically, but deed records perpetuate their identity.

Cemetery locations may be given merely by section or by specific detail in terms of degrees. One can examine deed records quickly by limiting himself to Grantor indices, checking only the "exception" and "description" columns. It is impossible to investigate all deed records, but intuitive historiographical knowledge can eliminate much deed searching.

Knowledge of the area, especially the location of rivers and land barriers, of nationality groupings of settlers, and of their former residence will also suggest cemetery locations. Early settlers followed river beds into virgin territory, and the majority of cemeteries founded within twenty-five years of a county's formation are located close to these waterways. Samplings of deed records



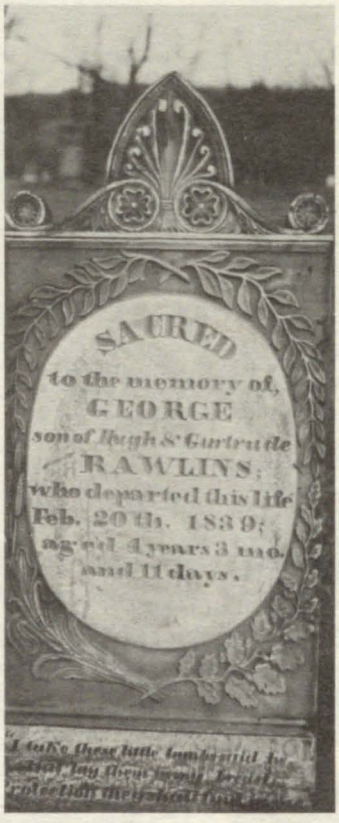


FIG. 1a and b. SANDSTONE. This type of stone generally dates prior to 1850. Being soft, it readily shows the stonecutter's talents. It also weathers easily. If data is completely worn away, compare the general shape of the stone to other legible stones nearby to at least date the stone within a decade of its erection. Usually the simpler the shape, the earlier used. Note the spelling of "Gurtrude." Note the near similarity of the "3" and "9" in "1839" and the difficulty in reading the "4" in "4 years."

FIG. 2a MARBLE. This type of stone generally dates from the late 1830's to the late 1860's. In the 1860's and 1870's square and usually towering marble stones were used. The latter weathers severely, especially in cities, and can be the hardest to read. Note the script used on this stone, especially the differences in the "4's" and the script "1." If the stone is chipped or worn, one can easily err in reading it. If in doubt, state so in your record.

JOHANNES FRITZ
Geb. d. 11. Jan. 1824, in
Dorf Löllbach Landgrafschaft
Hessenhomburg vor der Höhe
in Deutschland Wanderte im
Jahre 1843 nach Amerika
Verheirathete sich mit
Dorothea Heddel im Jahre
1847. Gest. den 1. Jän. 1880
im Alter von 56 Jahren
9 mo. & 26 Tage.

FIG. 2b MARBLE. This stone represents the square, towering type of stone. Foreign language inscriptions (and stones with unusual symbols) can be translated more accurately through a picture to make a record for an expert's advice. This stone offers a brief history of the person and can simplify a search in naturalization and marriage records. Note the weathering of the inscription. Note the "4" in "14" and "1824."

for sections through which rivers run might reveal several cemeteries. Of later settlement, those of German background had their own church cemeteries. Rarely will there exist private or family cemeteries in areas of their settlement unless a different nationality, as the English, were there before. Settlers from the South, or from southern Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, tended to have private or neighborhood cemeteries. New Englanders and immigrants often centered their westward movement around their religion and so frequently had church cemeteries.

TOOLS

Having determined cemetery locations, one still needs additional preparations—tools. A garden spade is vital for unearthing sunken tombstones and serves as an excellent lever for fallen stones. If one has to cut his way to tombstones, a small machete for cutting weeds and vines, a hatchet for chopping fallen tree limbs, a masonry hammer for use not only as a small pry-bar but also as a root cutter, a grass-trimmer, and even a chisel for severing difficult roots, are needed. Explore the soil with a thin probing rod, since stones might be buried from six inches to several feet. For the reading of inscriptions, several wire and bristle brushes varying in coarseness, a large putty knife scraper, and chalk can reveal even the faintest lettering. While the use of wire brushes on tombstones is sometimes challenged, if used carefully, *no*

FIG. 3 SOFT GRANITE. This type of stone generally dates from the 1880's through the mid 1910's. The soft, gray granite weathers somewhat and is susceptible to lichen and moss.

damage will result. Monument firms as a matter of policy restore old tombstones with sandblasting techniques. They suggest that removal of dirt, moss, lichen, and vines from the surface prevents roots from forming hairline cracks and chipping. Brushes should be used lightly but briskly and parallel to the surface.

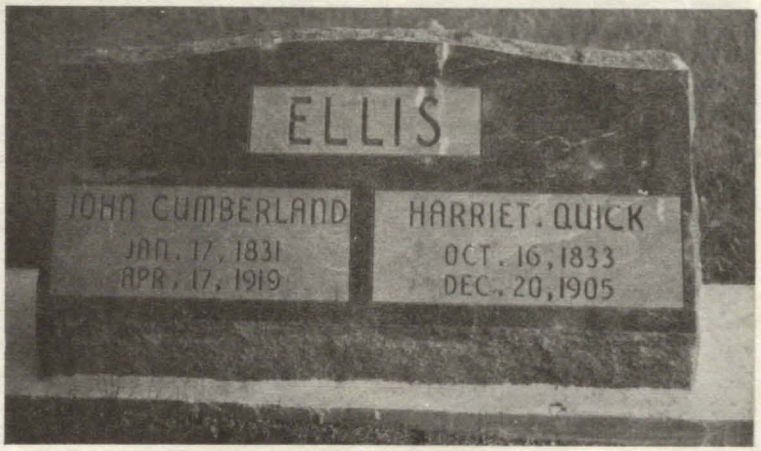
A soft white chalk gives the best results for reading, especially when rubbed into the stone at difficult spots, although yellow chalk offers better contrast on white stones. Charcoal gives good contrast on light-colored, polished marble. Any type of powder can be effective but is hard to control in positioning it on the surface. Rubbings are more time-consuming and the large sheets present a storage problem. Chalk offers the greatest contrast, especially for photographs.

If one wants to measure the size of the stone or area of the cemetery, add twine, rulers, and tape measures to the kit. Finally, a clip board with pads of 4″ X 6″ paper serve as the best means for the actual transcription. Many of these tools, excluding brushes, chalk and paper, are used infrequently, except in overgrown cemeteries.

PRECAUTIONS

Finally, consider personal safeguards. Dress in thick, protective clothing—levi pants or slacks, with a substantial shirt and work gloves. Include drinking water, a first aid kit and an insect repellent spray, and add a poison ivy preventative ointment of 10 percent sodium perborate (which any druggist can prepare). Poison ivy flourishes

FIG. 4 GRANITE. This type of stone, varying in shapes and sizes, dates back into the 1880's and is still used. If it dates earlier than the 1880's, it is a replacement stone, frequently with less data than the original.



in cemeteries, even in winter. After visiting a cemetery, wash your hands immediately as an additional prevention against poison ivy. A boraxo waterless hand cleaner or ordinary alkali yellow laundry soap and plenty of rags serve this purpose well. Now you are ready to transcribe.

PLOTTING THE CEMETERY

Begin by plotting the cemetery. Give its location according to county, township, and quarter section and list all roads and their distances from a town or state highway to the cemetery. Ask permission to cross private land. If stones no longer exist in a cemetery, it is quite important to list the cemetery and this fact in the final copy. Such knowledge can prove quite helpful to a researcher. You might be of additional help by locating references of burials from obituaries or descendants. For a cemetery with stones, measure its exact size, draw a rough map, note any unusual features, and indicate the relative position of each stone.

COPYING

The copy of each inscription determines your real success. One generally encounters four basic types of tombstones: slate or sandstone [figs. 1, 5, 9a], marble [figs. 2a, b, 8, 9a, b, 10], gray granite [fig. 3], and polished granite [fig. 4]. The first type is the oldest, used generally before 1850. White chalk offers excellent contrast with the black slate of New England stones and the brown sandstones of the midwest. These stones usually are covered with moss or lichen and flake easily [fig. 5]. Use care in cleaning them.

White marble stones stain easily and after nearly one hundred years of exposure to the elements, tend to have their inscriptions weathered almost completely away. These often are the hardest to read. Rub chalk into the surface with your thumb or palm and blow the excess dust away [figs. 6a, b, c]. Lichen and moss also attack the gray granite stones, but a light brushing and white chalk quickly make their inscriptions legible. Polished granite tombstones, in popular use since the 1890's, offer the least problem in copying, but if white chalk is rubbed into the lettering, photographing

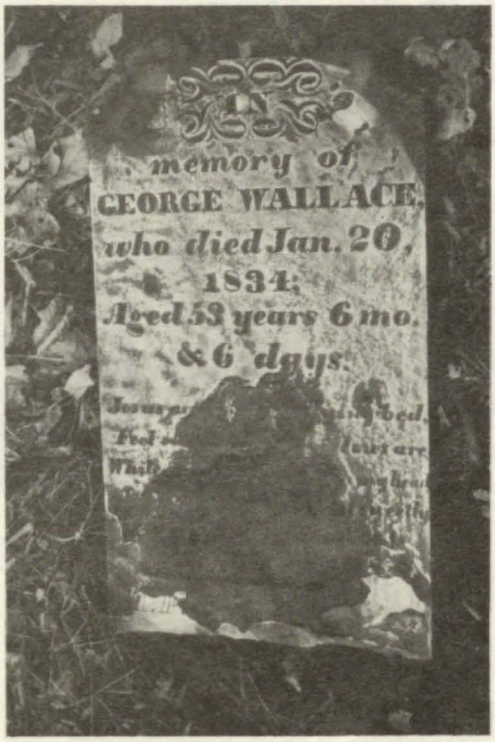


FIG. 5 WEATHERING. On sandstone markers, note how the combination of lichen, moss, and frost have caused this stone to begin to flake away; such stones need pictures made before all the data is gone. Deposit a copy of the picture in a library where it can become public property for the welfare of history. Note: If this stone were partially buried, covering up the last line, one could expect more data since there is no "&" before the "7 mo." Note the "4" in "1834."

becomes sharper [fig. 7]. A cemetery frequently has a variety of these types of stones, and with little experience one can become proficient in reading any type.

In copying, accuracy must dominate. Copy the data on both sides of a 4″ X 6″ card or paper. It is best to work in teams, with each person consulting the stone. Record inscriptions *exactly* as they appear, including "mistakes," as "Henery Eads/son of/Wm & Hariet Eades/died/Dec. 6, 1844/aged 6 weaks/and 32 days." [figs. 9a, c]. You can correct any errors in a note on the final record. Quakers, for example, reverse the day and month. In copying all tombstones, serve only as a transcriber and not as an interpreter of inscriptions by abbreviating or codifying months or symbols.

FIG. 6a This stone represents a typical situation in reading an illegible stone. Many ignore any reference to this type and those who are accurate merely write "illeg."

FIG. 6b If you brush the stone briskly and rub on chalk, you begin to make out part of the stone.

FIG. 6c If you rub chalk into the stone with your palm and blow the excess away, then this stone is easily readable.

Beware of pitfalls in copying, including mistaking a "4" for a "1" [figs. 8, 1, 2a, b, 5] or confusing one for the other in the following combination: 8-5-6-3-9-2 [figs. 9a, b, c]. Copy accurately the months "Mar." and "May," and "Jan." and "June" [fig. 10]. Distinguish between a "C" and a "G" [fig. 11]. A study of such letters and numbers on preserved stones might offer the key to determining the correct letter on a worn or chipped stone.

Make certain you have included all the inscription. If a stone is partially buried and ends, "aged 66 Yrs, 3 Ms," more data is there; if it ends "aged 66 Yrs & 3 Ms.," you are relatively sure of having the full inscription [fig. 5]. Read any epitaphs since they sometimes mention birthplaces or tell if a "mother" or "father" is "gone" [figs. 12, 2]. Finally, do not rush or work when tired since you then tend to compromise in completeness and become inaccurate.

It is vital to record all burial indicators, including field stones, depressions, and mounds, and it is equally important to indicate their sizes and relationship with tombstones. If, for example, you find two sets of field stones, approximately three feet apart each, and to the right of the stones of a husband and wife, it is possible that these are the graves of their children. If a cemetery has been cleaned with field stones removed and the ground leveled, discover who did the work and when. If it was a WPA project, perhaps a plat of the cemetery containing such grave indicators exists. It may be possible only to learn that a "few" or "many" such signs did exist. Mention such facts in the introduction.

MAKING A PLAT

Such investigation demands a plat of the cemetery. One suggestion a researcher can follow is to number each inscription, sets of field stones, depressions and rises logically in rows, and draw a map, relating the inscriptions' numbers to the map, as follows:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15
16 17 18 19 20 21 etc.

Give the number before each name in an alphabetical transcription so one can pinpoint exactly one grave in relation to others. This method has the advantage of showing distances (and family groupings) as well as stone relationships. If the cemetery is large, list graves by numbers in the final record as well as by an alphabetical listing. Merely use graph paper in making the map and pace off distances.

FIG. 7 CHALK. Chalk rubbed into rough surface around smooth letters shows the greatest contrast. Rubbing chalk over smooth surfaces, as over "Margaret," helps but not much. The rest of the stone is hard to read. Note: this is a granite stone replacing an older one.

While your cemetery plat is valuable for giving the cemetery's condition when you transcribed it, do not fail to search for prior plats. Check plat books in the recorder's office at the county court house. If the cemetery was platted, it will give as a minimum lot numbers, and sometimes it may include owners' names. Perhaps years ago an association was created for cemetery care. A plat and records may still exist for such an organization, especially if the cemetery was part of a church society or a large neighborhood. County histories and the local historian are valuable in locating such records. If a large town or city cemetery contains an "old part" for which records no longer exist, and you are interested in locating a family name, check the Grantee deed index book in the recorder's office in the court house. Such diligence and historical investigation could expand greatly the knowledge of burials for a cemetery.

PHOTOGRAPHY

As an additional project, one may wish to photograph tombstones; the following suggestions are helpful. An Instamatic camera might be sufficient, but it has a fixed-focus lens which is inadequate for close work; exact conditions are needed. Polaroid cameras have the advantage of seeing the results immediately, but this camera has the disadvantage of not producing a negative, placing too much value on one picture. Obtain best results by using a camera with 35 mm black and white 20 exposure film with an ASA rating of 125.

In photographing, use a light meter at the stone, even if the camera has an automatic photocell-controlled lens, since the amount of light hitting the photocell may be different from that hitting the stone.

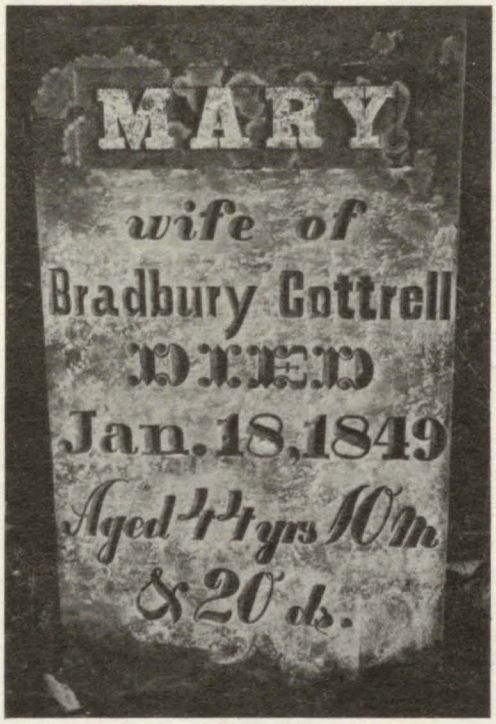


FIG. 8 4-1 COMBINATION. Note the two types of "4". If this stone were chipped one could confuse "44" for "11" and "10 m" for "11 m." If you have difficulty deciphering a four or one, see if there is another similar number on the stone. Note the lichen around "Mary."

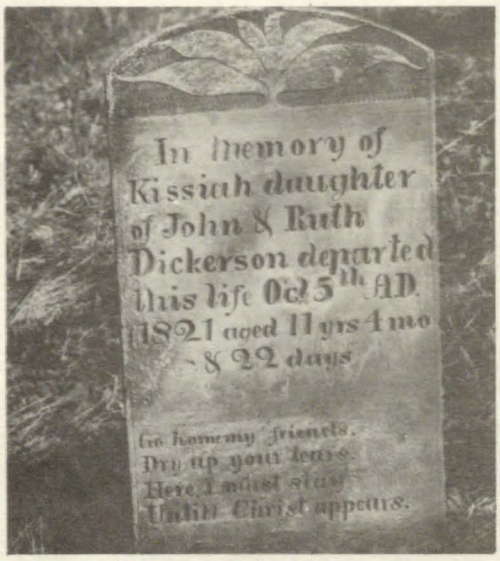


FIG. 9a 8-5-6-3-9-2 COMBINATION. Be careful in accurately copying the "2" in "1821" and "22 days" in not mistaking them for a "9." Also copy "Oct. 5th" as it appears. See also Fig. 9b.

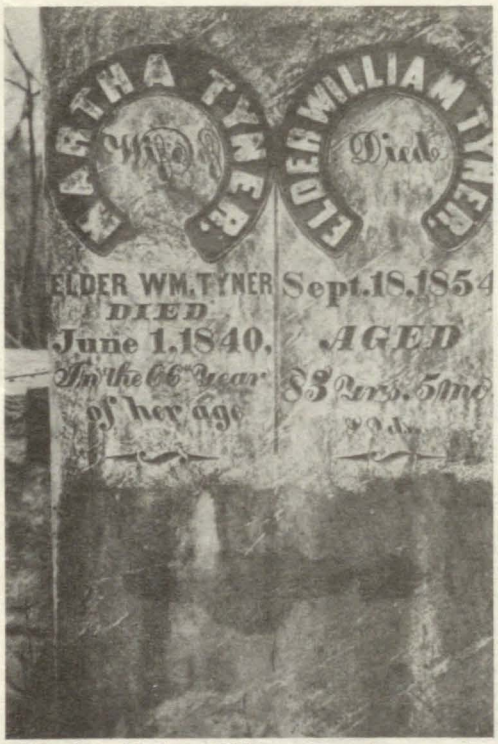


FIG. 9b. Under "William Tyner" note that this is a "9" for "9 ds." rather than a "2" even though it is quite similar to the "2" on fig. 9a. Major wear on this stone could cause confusion between the "83" and "5 mo." Script "8's" can cause confusion with a "3" or a "6" if worn or chipped.

Photograph most stones at a distance of about four feet, making certain that the entire stone is centered in the view-finder. Best results are obtained on a hazy day. Each print costs about $0.15, so this project might be limited to small cemeteries, stones written in foreign script [fig. 2b] or containing unusual symbols, or to old, decaying, or broken stones whose data will be gone in a few years.

FINAL COPY

The last step in transcribing cemetery records is the final copy. Organization is the key. In an introduction, describe the cemetery as to kind—family, church or public. Give the cemetery's location, size and its present condition and that of the tombstones. If you have knowledge of the family, give that also. Next tell what you did and give the limitations of your re-

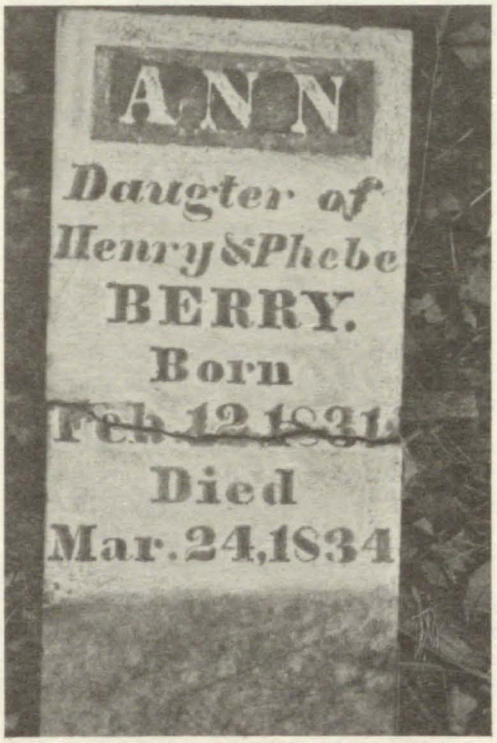


FIG. 9c. When a stone is broken, transcribing becomes even more difficult. For example on this stone an "8" could be confused with a "9." Compare it with the "8" below it. Note the spelling of "Daugter." (Compare picture of stone with written transcription on sample cemetery description.)

FIG. 10 JAN.-JUN CONFUSION. January is frequently abbreviated while June rarely is. Care is needed for reading each letter and number on a stone.

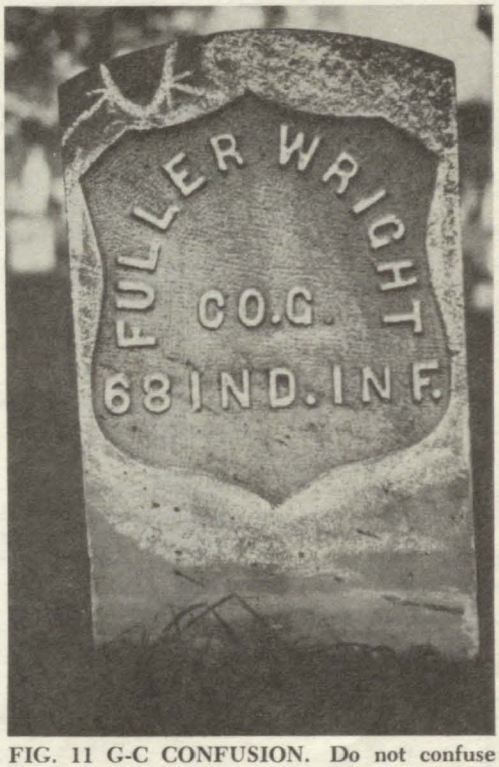


FIG. 11 G-C CONFUSION. Do not confuse "Co. G" with a Co. C. Also on many older government markers, a 5 is frequently confused for a 6. Note the lichen; this hastens deterioration by leading to frost damage and a rough surface, causing confusion in copying. On military stones compare the inscription with the state Adjutant-General's reports.

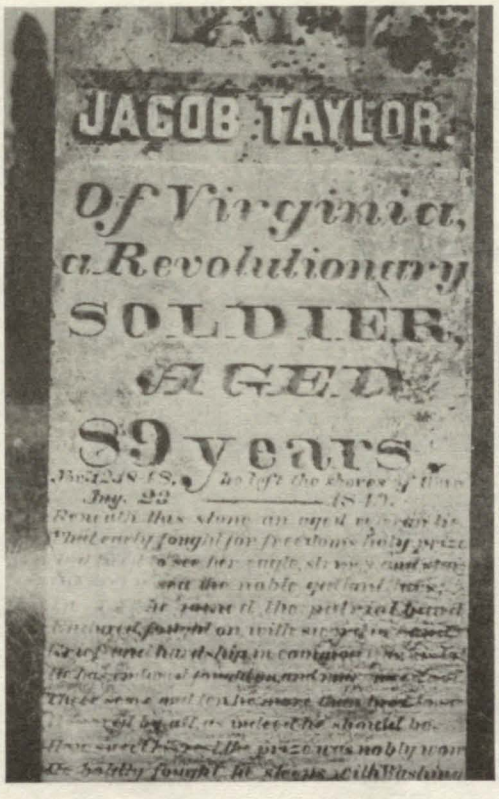
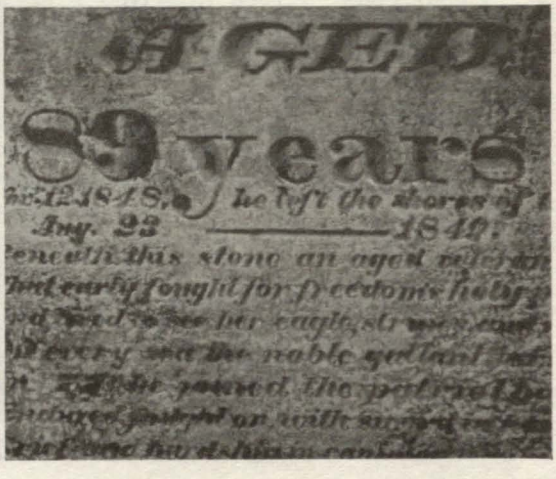


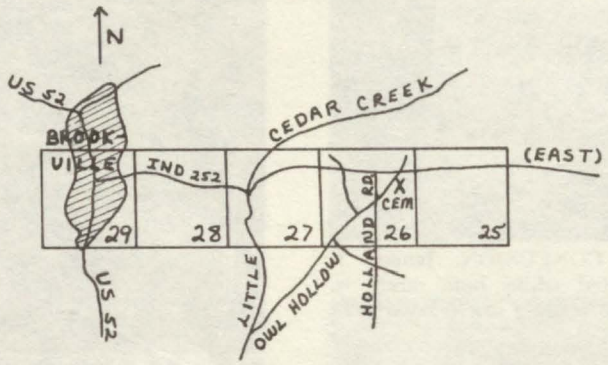
FIG. 12 EPITAPHS. This stone reveals the value in reading epitaphs. His birthdate can be computed and one can gain clues to his military service. Frequently reference to a "father," "mother," or "children" or a birthplace or deathplace, or even the cause of death can be contained in an epitaph, as in fig. 2.



SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

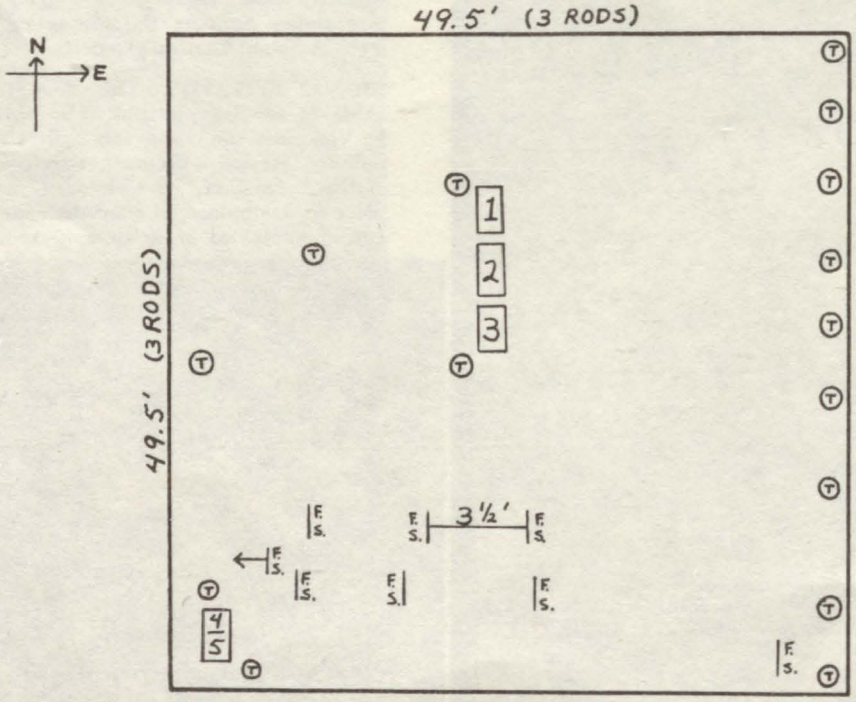
BERRY FARM CEMETERY

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: (Deed Record 6, p. 180, Franklin County, Indiana) Henry Berry to Boards of Commissioners of the County of Franklin: "Beginging [sic] at a Stone Marked SW on the underside N40°E39 Poles from the South West Corner of the North East quarter of section 26 town 9 range 2 West; thence East 3 poles to a stone Marked H on the underside; thence North 3 poles to a stone marked L on the underside; thence West 3 poles to a stone marked I on the underside; thence South 3 poles to the place of beginning containing 9 square rods—the corner stones being placed fifteen inches under ground."



PLAT OF BERRY CEMETERY

F. S. = field stone T = tree



SAMPLE TRANSCRIPTION

BERRY FAMILY CEMETERY

NE¼ SECTION 26 T9N R2W of 1 PM, Brookville Township, Franklin County

Henry Berry Sr., his wife and four children came from Rockingham County, Virginia, to Brookville Township, Franklin County, Indiana, arriving there November 7, 1816. Henry bought 147 acres in the SE¼ 26-9-2 from John Hedley for $588 on July 9, 1817. (No record of purchase for the land on which the cemetery is located has been found.) The Berrys had eleven children, of which nine reached maturity. No relationship has been established between Cyrus Greyer and the Berry family, although Mary Greyer came from Rockingham County. In January, 1869, Cyrus Greyer was living in Shelbyville, Indiana.

The Berry Private Family Cemetery, on the S. & I. White property (1964), 3½ miles east of Brookville, Indiana, on State Road 252, is on the south side of the road, about 500 feet from it. The cemetery is enclosed by cedar trees, many fallen down, and a stone fence, now partially destroyed. All tombstones are removed from their bases; the cemetery is unkempt and cattle wander through at will. The cemetery and all the tombstones were photographed in the Spring, 1968.

See the Cemetery Plat for location of markers.

1) BERRY, A. _____, ANN/Daugter [sic] of/Henry & Phebe/BERRY./ Born/Feb. 12, 1831/Died/Mar. 24, 1834/. SBT "Feb. 12, 1831." Px.

2) BERRY, H. _____, In Memory of/HENRY BERRY/BORN/June 20, 1783/DIED/Sept. 20, 1864/AGED/81 Years & 3 Mo./. "In Memory of" & "Henry Berry" are arched. Px.

3) BERRY, P. _____, PHEBE/Wife of/HENRY BERRY/Born/Sept. 17, 1789;/Died/June 15, 1854./. Epitaph. SBA 1 - r from Sept. to "4" of 1854. Px.

BERRY, S. _____, SARAH BERRY was born June 11, 1816 in Rockingham Co., Va., a daughter of Henry & Phebe Berry, and died 3 miles east of Brookville July 28, 1894, aged 78-1-17. Her obituary is in the *Brookville American*, August 2, 1894, p. 1, col. 6, & states she is buried in the "family cemetery." No stone.

4) GREYER, M. _____, MARY/Wife of/Cyrus Greyer/DIED/Feb. 19, 1860/ AGED/43 years 9 mo. &/10 days./. "Mary" and "wife of" are arched. SBA 1 - r from "Died" thru "Greyer," which is virtually illeg. OSSW Mary E. Greyer. Px.

5) GREYER, M. E. ___, MARY EMELY/Daughter of/Cyrus & Mary/GREYER/ Died Jan. 18, 1855/Aged 16 days./.SBA upward, l - r, thru "Mary" & "Mary" is partially illeg. OSSW Mary Greyer. Px.

NOTE:

SBT	means "stone broken through"	Copied Summer, 1965
SBA	means "stone broken angling"	Photographed, Spring, 1968
OSSW	means "on same stone with"	Typed, October, 1968
Px	means "picture of tombstone"	John J. Newman
		Brookville, Indiana

search, for example, if you were unable to read all stones or if the cemetery's condition might have hidden some stones. Describe unmarked graves by the number of ground depressions and mounds and indicate the size of graves marked by fieldstones. Make a rough map of the cemetery's location and draw a plat, as suggested above. Do not give your record the appearance of being a complete transcription of the cemetery and stones there; a person can be buried with no indication of the fact. Such suggestion of "completeness" can mislead a researcher.

Organize the inscriptions in a logical, consistent manner. The following may serve as a guide:

(5) EADS, H. ——, In Memory of/ HENRY EADS/ born/in the year 1755 / died / August 23, 1843. Stone broken at base & between "in the year" & "1755." On same stone with Mary Eads. A Rev. War soldier — Md. S322226. "in Memory of" is arched.

The most accurate publication of inscriptions is to print the inscription exactly as it appears on the tombstone—allowing a printed line for each line on the stone, including all arched lines and peculiarities. Unfortunately this method becomes expensive in space and money for publishing large cemetery records.

It is important to remember that your record is source material; therefore, give the inscription *exactly* as it appears on the tombstone. If you want to correct or add any data, give it in parentheses after the inscription. Conclude your copy with your name and the date.

Cemetery transcribing can be considered an art. It requires skill, interest, and ability, all developed through patient practice. As your artful experience grows, transcribing becomes personal in the techniques used. Any method is efficient if it does not sacrifice accuracy and completeness.

Satisfaction results if your transcription appears as a verbal image of the stone itself. With cemeteries slowly being destroyed—by farming operations, by vandals, by nature—your accurate record grows in value. Not only will your art aid researchers throughout the country if placed in major libraries, but it will also serve future generations when tombstones have worn to smooth remembrances or become some thoughtless individual's doorstep.

John J. Newman, a native of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, graduated from Marquette University in 1963. He earned a masters degree in history from Indiana University in 1967 and taught high school in Wisconsin and Indiana for several years. Early in 1970 Newman was appointed field representative for the Indiana Division of the Indiana State Library, and in November of that year he became State Archivist for Indiana.

Newman began tracing his family as early as 1958 and has since developed an avid interest in genealogy. He has transcribed numerous cemeteries, working in New England, Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, Iowa, Kansas, California, Oregon, and Montana, as well as the entire state of Indiana. It is from such research and field experience that this technical leaflet on cemetery transcribing has developed.

TECHNICAL LEAFLET 9

Technical Leaflets are published by the American Association for State and Local History for the purpose of bringing useful information to persons working in the state and local history movement. The series does not follow the same categories month after month, since the selection of subject matter is based upon varied inquiries received by the Association's home office. The leaflets, which are detachable from the magazine, are copyrighted © and should be cataloged as part of HISTORY NEWS.

American Association for State and Local History Technical Leaflet 9, HISTORY NEWS, Volume 26, No. 5, May, 1971 *Cemetery Transcribing: preparations and procedures.*

This replaces an earlier leaflet 9 which has been discontinued.

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